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1893.

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 214.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1893. PRICE TWOPENCE.

A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

BY MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. ROMAYNE had been left, eighteen years before, absolutely penniless. When Dennis Falconer took her back from Nice to her uncle's home in London, she had returned to that house wholly dependent, for herself and for her little five-year-old boy, on the generosity she would meet with there. Fortunately old Mr. Falconer was a rich man. There had been a good deal of money in the Falconer family, and as its representatives decreased in number, that money had collected itself in the hands of the few survivors.

A long nervous illness, slight enough in itself, but begetting considerable restlessness and irritability, had followed on her return to London; so natural, her tender-hearted cousin and uncle had said, though, as a matter of fact, such an illness was anything but natural in such a woman as Mrs. Romayne, and anything but consistent with her demeanour during the early days of her widowhood. Partly by the advice of the doctor, partly by reason of the sense, unexpressed but shared by all concerned, that London was by no means a desirable residence for the widow of William Romayne, old Mr. Falconer and his daughter left their quiet London home and went abroad with her. No definite period was talked of for their return to England, and they settled down in a charming little house near the Lake of Geneva.

In the same house, when Julian

was seven years old, Frances Falconer died. Her death was comparatively sudden, and the blow broke her father's heart. From that time forward his only close interests in life were Mrs. Romayne and her boy. The vague expectation of a return to London at some future time faded out altogether. Mr. Falconer's only desire was to please his niece, and she, with the same tendency towards seclusion which had dictated their first choice of a Continental home, suggested a little place near Heidelberg. Here they lived for five years more, and then Mr. Falconer also died, leaving the bulk of his property to Mrs. Romayne. The remainder was to go to Dennis Falconer; to his only other near relation, William Romayne's little son, he left no money.

So seven years after her husband's death Mrs. Romayne was a rich woman again; rich and independent as she had never been before, and practically alone in the world with her son. In her relations with her son, those seven years had brought about a curious alteration or development.

The dawnings of this change had been observed by Frances Falconer during the early months of Mrs. Romayne's widowhood. She had spoken to her father with tears in her eyes of her belief that her cousin was turning for consolation to her child. Blinely attached to her cousin, she had never acknowledged her previous easy indifference as a mother. She stood by while the first place in little Julian's easy affections was gradually won away from herself not only without a thought of resentment, but without any capacity for the criticism of Mrs. Romayne's demeanour in her new capacity as a devoted mother. To her that devotion was the

natural and beautiful outcome of the overthrow of her cousin's married life. To sundry other people the new departure presented other aspects. Dennis Falconer, spending a few days at the house near the Lake of Geneva, regarded with eyes of stern distaste what seemed to him the most affected, superficial travesty of the maternal sentiment ever exhibited. Meditating upon the subject by himself, he referred Mrs. Romayne's assumption of the character of devoted mother to the innate artificiality of a fashionable woman denied the legitimate outlet of society life. He went away marvelling at the blindness of his uncle and cousin, and asking himself with heavy disapprobation how long the pose would last.

Time, as a matter of fact, seemed only to confirm it. The half-laughing, wholly artificial manner with which Mrs. Romayne had alluded to her "boy" in Mrs. Pomeroy's drawing-room was the same manner with which, in his early school-days, she had alluded to her "little boy," only developed by years. Mr. Falconer's death and her own consequent independence had made no difference in her way of life. Julian's education had been proceeded with on the Continent as had been already arranged, his mother living always near at hand that they might be together whenever it was possible. In his holidays they took little luxurious tours together. But into society Mrs. Romayne went not at all until Julian was over twenty, when the haze of fifteen years had wound itself about the memory of William Romayne and his misdeeds. Of those misdeeds William Romayne's son knew nothing. The one point of discord between old Mr. Falconer and his niece had been her alleged intention of keeping the truth from him, if possible, for ever. Mr. Falconer's death removed the only creature who had a right to protest against her decision. When Julian, as he grew older, asked his first questions about his father, she told him that he had "failed," and had died suddenly, and begged him not to question her. And the boy, careless and easy-going, had taken her at her word.

With the termination of Julian's university career, it became necessary that some arrangement should be made for his future. As Julian grew up, the topic had come up between the mother and son with increasing frequency, introduced as a rule not, as might have been expected, by the young man, whom it most concerned,

but by Mrs. Romayne. From the very first it had been presented to him as a foregone conclusion that the start in life to which he was to look forward was to be made in London. London was to be their home, and he was to read for the English Bar; on these premises all Mrs. Romayne's plans and suggestions were grounded, and Julian's was not the nature to carve out the idea of a future for himself in opposition to that presented to him. Consequently the arrangements, of which the bright little house in Chelsea was the preliminary outcome, were matured with much gaiety and enthusiasm, in what Mrs. Romayne called merrily "a family council of two," and a certain touch of feverish excitement which had pervaded his mother's consideration of the subject, moved Julian to a carelessly affectionate compunction in that it was presumably for his sake that she had remained so long away from the life she apparently preferred.

The arrangement by which Mrs. Romayne eventually came to London alone was not part of the original scheme. As the time fixed for their departure thither drew nearer that feverish excitement increased upon her strangely. It seemed as an expression of the nervous restlessness that possessed her that she finally insisted on his joining some friends who were going for two months to Egypt, and leaving her to "struggle with the agonies of furnishing," as she said, alone.

The arrangement had separated the mother and son for the first time within Julian's memory. The fact had, perhaps, had little practical influence on his enjoyment in the interval, but it gave an added fervour to his boyish demonstration of delight in that first moment of meeting as he held her in his vigorous young arms, and kissed her again and again.

"To think of my having surprised you, after all!" he cried, gleefully, at last. "You ought to have had my telegram this morning. Why, you've got nervous while you've been alone, mother! You're quite trembling!"

Mrs. Romayne laughed a rather uncertain little laugh. She was indeed trembling from head to foot. Her face was very pale still, but as she raised it to her son the strange, transfigured look had passed from it utterly, and her normal expression had returned to it in all its superficial liveliness, brought back by an effort of will, conscious or instinctive, which was perceptible in the slight stiff-

ness of all the lines. At the same moment she seemed to become aware of the close, clinging pressure with which her hand had closed upon the arm which held her, and she relaxed it in a little gesture of playful rebuke and deprecation.

"What would you have, bad boy?" she said lightly. "Don't you know I hate surprises? Oh, I suppose you want to flatter yourself that your poor little mother can't get on without you to take care of her! Well, perhaps she can't, very well. There's a demoralising confession for you, sir!"

But it was not such a confession as her face had been only a few minutes before; in fact, the spoken words seemed rather to belie that mute witness. They were spoken in her ordinary, most artificial tone, and the gesture with which she laid her hand on his arm to draw him into the drawing-room was one of her usual pretty little affected gestures—as sharp a contrast as possible to the first clinging, unconscious touch.

"Let me look at you," she said gaily, "and make sure that I have got my own bad penny back from Africa, and not somebody else's!"

She drew him laughingly into the fullest light the fading day afforded, and proceeded to "inspect" him, as she said, her face full of a superficial vivacity, which seemed to be doing battle all the time with something behind—something which looked out of her hard, bright eyes eager and insistent, and strangely like suspense or dread.

The figure that stood opposite was one that any woman might have been proud to call her son. Julian Romayne was a tall, well-made young man—taller by a head than the mother smiling up at him; he was well developed for his twenty-three years, slight and athletic-looking, and carrying himself more gracefully than most young Englishmen. But except in this particular, and in a slight tendency towards the use of more gesture than is common in England, his foreign training was in no wise perceptible in his appearance. The first impression he made on people who knew them both was that he was exactly like his mother, and that his mother's features touched into manliness were a very desirable inheritance for her son; for he was distinctly good-looking. But as a matter of fact, only the upper part of his face, and his colouring, were Mrs. Romayne's. He had the fair hair

which had been hers eighteen years ago; he had her blue eyes and her pale complexion, and his nose and the shape of his brow were hers. But his mouth was larger and rather fuller-lipped than his mother's, and the line of the chin and jaw was totally different. No strongly-marked characteristics, either intellectual or moral, were to be read in his face; his expression was simply bright and good-tempered with the good temper which has never been tried, and is the result rather of circumstances than of principle.

That strange something in Mrs. Romayne's face seemed to retreat into the depths from which it had come as she looked at him. Apparently she did not find what she had dreaded to find. She finished her inspection with a gay tirade against the coat which he was wearing, and Julian replied with a boyish laugh.

"I knew you'd be down upon it!" he said. "I say, does it look so very bad? I'll get a new fit out to-morrow—two or three, in fact! Mother, what an awfully pretty little drawing-room! What an awfully clever little mother you are!"

He flung his arm round her again with the careless, affectionate demonstrativeness which her manner seemed to produce in him, and looked round the room with admiring eyes. They were the eyes of a young man who knew better than some men twice his age how a room should look, and whose appreciation was better worth having than it seemed.

"You're quite ready for me, you see!" he declared delightedly. "What did you mean, I should like to know, by wanting to keep me away for another fortnight?"

There was a moment's pause before Mrs. Romayne spoke. She looked up into his face with a rather strange expression in her eyes, and then looked away across the room to where a little pile of accepted invitations lay on her writing-table. That curious light at once of battle and of triumph was strong upon her face as it had not been yet.

"Yes," she said at last, and there was an unusual ring about her voice. "I am quite ready for you!"

Something more than the furnishing of a house had gone to the preparation of a place in society for the widow and son of William Romayne, and only the woman who had effected that preparation knew how and how completely it had been achieved.

A moment later Mrs. Romayne's face

had changed again, and she was laughing lightly at Julian's comments as she disengaged herself from his hold, and went towards the bell.

"Foolish boy!" she said as she rang. "I'm glad you think it's nice. We'll have some tea."

She had just poured him out a cup of tea, and quick, easy question and answer as to his crossing were passing between them, when the front-door bell rang, and she broke off suddenly in her speech.

"Who can that be?" she said. "Hardly a caller; it must be six o'clock! Now, I wonder whether, if it should be a caller, Dawson will have the sense to say not at home? Perhaps I had better—" she rose as she spoke, and moved quickly across the room to the door. But she was too late! As she opened the drawing-room door she heard the street door open below, and heard the words, "At home, ma'am." With the softest possible ejaculation of annoyance she closed the door stealthily.

"Such a nuisance!" she said rapidly. "What a time to call! I trust they won't—" And thereupon her face changed suddenly and completely into her usual society smile as the door opened again, and she rose to receive her visitors. "My dear Mrs. Halse!" she exclaimed, "why, what a delightful surprise!" The fact that her unexpected and undesired visitor happened to be "that woman," as she was in the habit of mentally designating Mrs. Halse, only made her voice a trifle sweeter and her smile a trifle more pronounced than usual. "Now, don't say that you have come to tell me that anything has gone wrong about the bazaar?" she continued agitatedly. "Don't tell me that, Miss Pomeroy!"

She was shaking hands with her younger visitor as she spoke, a girl of apparently about twenty, very correctly dressed, as pretty as a girl can be with neither colour, expression, nor startlingly correct features, whose eyes are for the most part fastened on the ground. She was Mrs. Pomeroy's only child. She did not deal Mrs. Romayne the blow which the latter appeared to anticipate, but reassured her in a neatly constructed sentence uttered in a rather demure but perfectly self-possessed voice.

Mrs. Halse had been prevented for the moment from monopolising the conversation by reason of her keen interest in the good-looking young man standing by the fireplace; but Miss Pomeroy's words were

hardly uttered before she turned excitedly to Mrs. Romayne. If she was going to make a mistake the disagreeables of the position would be with her hostess, she had decided.

"It's your son, Mrs. Romayne!" she cried. "It must be, surely! Such a wonderful likeness! Only, really, I can hardly believe that your son—I was ridiculous enough to expect quite a boy! Oh, don't say that he has just arrived and we are interrupting your first tête-à-tête! How truly frightful! Let me tell you this moment what I came for and fly!"

Mrs. Romayne answered her with a suave smile.

"I am going to introduce my boy first, if you don't mind," she said, and then as Julian, in obedience to her look, came forward, with the easy alacrity of a young man whose social instincts are of the highly civilised kind, she laid her hand on his arm with an artificial air of affectionate pride, and continued lightly: "Your first London introduction, Julian. Mrs. Ralph Halse, Miss Pomeroy! He has only just arrived, as you guessed," she added in an aside to Mrs. Halse, "and no doubt he is furiously angry with me for allowing him to be caught with the dust of his journey on him."

But Julian's anger was not perceptible in his face, or in his manner, which was very pleasant and ready. Even after he had handed tea and cake and subsided into conversation with Miss Pomeroy, Mrs. Halse found it difficult to concentrate herself on the business which had brought her to Chelsea. Her speech to Mrs. Romayne, as to the brilliant idea which had struck her just after the committee broke up, was as voluble as usual, certainly, but less connected than it might have been.

"That's all right, then. Such a weight off my mind!" she said, as she copied an address into her note-book with a circumstance and importance which would have befitted the settlement of the fate of nations. "It is so important to get things settled at once, don't you think so? The moment it occurred to me I saw how important it was that there should not be a moment's delay, and I said to Maud Pomeroy: 'Let us go at once to Mrs. Romayne, and she will give us the address, and then dear Mrs. Pomeroy can write the letter to-night.'" Here Mrs. Halse's breath gave out for the moment, and she let her eyes, which had strayed constantly in the direction of Julian and Miss Pome-

roy, rest on the young man's good-looking, well-bred face. "We must have your son among the stewards, Mrs. Romayne," she said. "So important! Now, I wonder whether it has occurred to you, as it has occurred to me, that a man or two—just a man or two"—with an impressive emphasis on the last word, as though three men would be altogether beside the mark—"would be rather an advantage on the ladies' committee? Now, what is your opinion, Mr. Romayne? Don't you think you could be very useful to us?"

She turned towards Julian as she spoke, quite regardless of the fact that Miss Pomeroy's correctly modulated little voice was stopped by her tones, and Mrs. Romayne turned towards him also. He and Miss Pomeroy were sitting together on the other side of the room, and as her eye fell upon the pair, tête-à-tête, as it were, a curious little flash, as of an idea or a revelation, leaped for an instant into Mrs. Romayne's eye.

Julian moved and transferred his attention to Mrs. Halse, with an easy courtesy which was a curiously natural reproduction of his mother's more artificial manner, and which was at the same time very young and unassuming. He laughed lightly.

"I shall be delighted to be a steward," he said, "or to be useful in any way. But the idea of a ladies' committee is awe-inspiring."

"You would make great fun of us at your horrid clubs, no doubt," retorted Mrs. Halse. "Oh, I know what you young men are! But you can be rather useful in these cases sometimes, though, of course, it doesn't do to tell you so."

She laughed loudly, and then rose with a sudden access of haste.

"We must really go!" she said. "Maud"—Mrs. Halse had innumerable girl friends, all of whom she was wont to address by their Christian names—"Maud, we are behaving abominably. We mustn't stay another moment, not another second."

But they did stay a great many other seconds, while Mrs. Halse pressed Julian into the service of the bazaar in all sorts and kinds of capacities, and managed to find out a great deal about his past life in the process. When at last she swooped down upon Maud Pomeroy, metaphorically speaking, as though that eminently decorous young lady had been responsible for the delay, and carried her off in a very tornado of protestation, attended to the front door, as in courtesy

bound, by Julian, Mrs. Romayne, left alone in the drawing-room, let her face relax suddenly from its responsive brightness into an unmistakeable expression of feminine irritation and dislike.

"Horrid woman!" she said to herself. "Patronises me! Well, she will talk about nothing but Julian all this evening, wherever she may be—and she goes everywhere—so perhaps it has been worth while to endure her. Hateful woman!" Then, as Julian appeared again, she said gaily: "My dear boy, they've been here an hour, and we shall both be late for dinner! Be off with you and dress!"

It was a very cosy little dinner that followed. Mrs. Romayne, as carefully dressed for her son as she could have been for the most critical stranger, was also at her brightest and most responsive. They talked for the most part of people and their doings; society gossip. Mrs. Romayne told Julian all about Mrs. Halse's bazaar; deriding the whole affair as an excuse for deriding its promoter, but with no realisation of its innate absurdity, and giving Julian to understand, at the same time, that it was "the thing" to be in it; an idea which he was evidently quite capable of appreciating. Dinner over, she drew his arm playfully through hers and took him all over the house. "Let me see that you approve!" she said, with a laughing assumption of burlesque suspense. The last room into which she took him was the little room at the back of the dining-room; and as his previous tone of appreciation and pleasure developed into genuine boyish exclamations of delight at the sight of it, the instant's intense satisfaction in her face struck oddly on her manner.

"You like it, my lord?" she said. "My disgraceful extravagance is rewarded by your gracious approval? Then your ridiculous mother is silly enough to be pleased." She gave him a little careless touch, half shake and half caress, and Julian threw his arm round her rapturously.

"I should think I did like it!" he said boyishly. "I say, shan't I have to work hard here! Mother, what an awfully jolly smoking table!"

"Suppose you smoke here now," suggested Mrs. Romayne, "by way of taking possession? Oh, yes! I'll stay with you."

She sat down, as she spoke, in one of the low basket-chairs by the fire, taking a little hand-screen from the mantelpiece as she did so. And Julian, with an ex-

clamoration of supreme satisfaction, threw himself into a long lounging-chair with an air of general proprietorship which sat oddly on his youthful figure, and proceeded to select and light a cigar.

A silence followed—rather a long silence. Julian lay back in his chair, and smoked in luxurious contentment. Mrs. Romayne sat with her dainty head, with its elaborate arrangement of red-brown hair, resting against a cushion, her face half hidden by the shade thrown by the fire-screen as she held it up in one slender, ringed hand. She seemed to be looking straight into the fire; as a matter of fact her eyes were fixed on the boyish face beside her. She was the first to break silence.

"It is two, nearly three, months since we were together," she said.

The words might have been the merest comment in themselves; but there was something in the bright tone in which they were spoken, something—half suggestion, half invitation—which implied a desire to make them the opening of a conversation. Julian Romayne's perceptions, however, were by no means of the acutest, and he detected no undertone.

"So it is!" he assented, with dreamy cheerfulness.

"How long did you spend in Cairo?"

The question, which came after a pause, was evidently another attempt on a new line. Again it failed.

"Didn't I tell you? Ten days!" said Julian, and he said no more.

Mrs. Romayne changed her position. She leant forward, her elbow on her knee, her cheek resting on her hand, the screen still shading her face.

"The catechism is going to begin," she said gaily.

Julian's cigar was finished. He roused himself, and dropped the end into the ash-tray by his side as he said with a smile:

"What catechism?"

"Your catechism, sir," returned his mother. "Do you suppose I am going to let you off without insisting on a full and particular account of all your doings during the last ten weeks?"

The words were spoken in the lightest tone possible; but behind the lightness there was a strange, hardly perceptible ring of earnestness which was almost anxiety. It was not perceptible to Julian, however, and he laughed.

"A full and particular account of all my doings!" he said. "I say, that sounds

formidable, doesn't it? The only thing is, you've had it in my letters."

"The fullest and most particular!" she laughed, with that same intense background to her laugh.

"The fullest and most particular!"

"Never mind," she exclaimed, leaning back in her chair again with a restless movement, "I shall catechise all the same. My curiosity knows no limits, you see. Now, you are on your honour as a—as a spoilt boy, understand."

"On my honour as a spoilt boy! All right. Fire away, mum!"

He pulled himself up, folding his hands with an assumption of "good little boy" demeanour, and laughing into her face. She also drew herself up, and laughed back at him. Yet even while she laughed there was something about her which seemed to isolate her strangely from the light-hearted boy, and touch the scene with a shadowy tint of what might in the future reveal itself as tragedy.

"Question one: Have you lost your heart to any pretty girl in the past ten weeks?"

"No, mum."

"Question two: Have you flirted—much—with any girl, pretty or plain?"

"No, mum."

"Have you overdrawn your allowance?"

"No, mum. I've got such a jolly generous mother, mum!"

"Have you! Oh! Have you any secrets from your mother?"

The question broke from her in a kind of cry, but she turned it before it was finished into burlesque, and Julian burst into a shout of laughter.

"Not a solitary secret! There, will that do?"

She was looking straight into his face—her own still in shadow—and there was a moment's pause; almost a breathless pause on her part it seemed; then she broke into a laugh.

"That will do capitally," she said. "The catechism is over."

She rose as she spoke, and added a word or two about a note she had to write.

"We may as well go up into the drawing-room if you have finished smoking," she said. "It is an invitation from some friends of the Pomeroy—a dinner. By-the-bye, don't you think Miss Pomeroy a very pretty girl?"

Julian's response was rather languid, but his mother did not press the point. She

turned away to replace the screen on the mantelpiece, and as she did so a thought seemed to strike her.

"Oh, Julian!" she said. "Did you go to Alexandria? What about those curtains you were to get me?"

Her back was towards Julian, and she did not notice the instant's hesitation which preceded his reply. He was putting his cigar-case into his pocket, and the process seemed to demand all his attention.

"I didn't go to Alexandria, unfortunately," he said lightly. "The Fosters had been there, and didn't care to go again."

The clock struck twelve that night when Mrs. Romayne rose at last from the chair in front of her bedroom fireplace in which she had been sitting for more than an hour. The fire had gone out before her eyes unnoticed, and she shivered a little as she rose. Her face was strangely pale and haggard-looking, and the red-brown hair harmonised ill with the anxiety of its look.

"It begins from to-night!" she said to herself. "It is his man's life that begins from to-night!"

"O. V."

A WESTERN SKETCH.

ONE morning, late in the fall, after our autumn "round up," we were all awake by daylight; for the boys on the creek were coming over to help brand the cattle, which were to be turned outside on the range till the following spring. None of the ranchmen round had anything like sufficient food to keep their whole outfit of cattle through the long western winter, so it was the practice to turn outside on the range the roughest of the crowd, and there they had to "wrestle" for a bare existence till the spring came, and they were "rounded up" again by their respective owners.

I had never been present at a cattle branding as yet, but now it was to take place on our own ranch I was much divided between two things: the wish to see all I could of Western life, and the fear that the process of branding might be a painful one to the animals concerned. But when I hinted that it must be anything but agreeable to the cows to have red-hot irons held on their sides, the boys hastened to assure me that only the hair was singed off, and as for the cattle themselves, they looked upon the whole proceeding as rather a good joke; but that I

had better "see the show," and then I could judge for myself.

"Only do take care, there's a good girl, to have plenty of grub for the boys; there are eight of them coming, mostly Americans, and I should like things 'nice,'" added Jack.

Of course, there are different grades of extravagance in the commissariat department, and to some it might mean a French dinner of many courses; but only one adventurous Englishwoman out West ever tried that on, thank Heaven; and I knew that, in the mouths of the boys, "things nice" meant quantity. But, being ambitious, I wished to introduce a few little luxuries into the menu, so made a compôte of orange and cocoanut, in addition to the plum-puddings, with clotted cream, which were the principal sweets.

All the chores had to be done before breakfast, as the boys were coming in time for that, trust them, and there was a great deal to be done—more than usual, in fact, for all the cattle which were to be branded had been "cut out" the day before, and driven into the corral, so that, consequently, all the animals had to be fed and watered there.

However, we had an early cup of tea, and "wrestled round" to such good purpose, that when our visitors arrived, punctual to the moment, we were ready for them, and they were ready for breakfast, and did full justice to the sweetbreads, kidneys, and potatoes, each fortifying himself first with a huge plateful of oatmeal or mush, a porridge made from crushed Indian corn.

Then, breakfast finished, the boys went out to attend to the business of the day, whilst E. and myself washed up, and, having got the dinner well forward, went out to see the fun.

It sounded from the shanty as if pandemonium was within a stone's throw. Fires were flaming up into the sky, as the fresh pitch-pine was flung on; and the lowing of the cattle in the outside corral joined with the choked bellowing of the poor thing which was being branded at the time; the shouts of the men, and the sickening smell of the burnt hair made such an impression upon me that I would fain have turned back again and shut myself up in the shanty. But my neighbour gave me a push; and, after all, it had to be done, whether I saw it or not; so the boys helped us up on to the side of the biggest haystack, from which we could safely watch all the proceedings.

We had three corrals, one inside the other, and it was the middle one which was always used for branding purposes, as might be seen from the great pine branding-post fixed in the centre. The three corrals were in a row opening into each other; in the one to our right hand were the animals to be branded—the branding corral itself was at our feet—whilst to the left was the one into which the cows were driven afterwards, the gate of which was left open, so that the creatures, upon recovering from their terror, could wander out, and rush down to the creek for water.

As we looked down the branding corral was empty, the right-hand one was full of the frightened animals, all lowing uneasily, and in the other a cow just let loose was rushing round and round in wild terror, foaming at the mouth and bellowing, but even as we watched it had found the open gate, and bounded away towards the water.

The boys were busy at one of the fires which had got very low and required making up; their arms and necks were bare, their feet in heavy riding-boots, a calico shirt and pair of blue overalls completed their costume, whilst their head-gear consisted of a broad-brimmed cowboy's hat. Grimed and dirty as they were with smoke and heat, they yet looked a fine set of fellows, the sinews on their arms standing out like whipcord with the exertion of "roping" the animals, dragging them round the post, and then throwing them down.

Whilst they were making up the fire one of the boys brought the branding-irons along to show me. Our brand was "O. V." We had bought it only a few weeks before from its former owner; and it took two irons, one for each letter, with long handles like great poker.

The fire had got low, which accounted for the lull in the proceedings, so the boys took advantage of the fact to turn their attention to some cans of lemonade we had brought out with us. One of them was preparing a large branch of pitch-pine to replenish the fire with. This he whittled with his knife to about an inch off the end, leaving the shavings adhering to the bough from the top to the bottom. He took a match, lighted one of them, which caught like tinder, then giving the branch one whirl round his head, he flung the flaming mass into the fire and a goodly pyramid of flame flared up into the deep blue of the sky, casting a

lurid glow all around, and seeming as if it would even melt the snowy peaks in the background; one could almost smell the heat in the clear autumn air. Then, the lemonade cans being quite empty, the business of the day recommenced; and we opened our sunshades, for the midday sun was now pouring down upon the corral, and waited, about a dozen animals being in the outer corral at the time, and prepared to enjoy the fun.

Presently one of the cows was turned into the branding corral, and the gate closed. It came in slowly and reluctantly, but no sooner did it catch sight of Jack, coiling his lariat round his hand, than it began to bellow uneasily and run round and round the corral, whilst the other boys ran after it, and tried to drive it into a corner for Jack to "rope." But it baffled all their skill; the creature seemed to understand what was going to be done to it, and not quite to like the idea, so it kept well out of the way of the rope, bending its head down almost to the ground so as to give the lariat no purchase; it merely glided on to its horns and off again. Presently, however, one of the boys perched himself upon the top railing of the corral, and as the cow came rushing round again in its wild career, pursued by all the other fellows, he gave a prolonged "Hoo-oo-oo!" and the animal, amazed by hearing the cattle call from above, raised its head enquiringly. This was Jack's opportunity; one jerk of his wrist and the rope went whirling through the air in circles, the noose was over the cow's head, and Jack darted in front of it to the branding-post, and twisted his end of the rope round it. Then the other boys hung on to it, and then began between men and animal a great game of tug, the cow pulling with all its strength away from the post, and the men striving with all theirs to bring its head close to it, ready for branding.

All the boys, except one, who was left in charge of the irons and the fire, tailed on to the rope, and slowly but surely they dragged the great brute up to its doom.

Of course, the cow was bound to come in the end, it only drew the noose the tighter by its struggles, and presently, snorting and kicking, with a strange, choked bellow in its throat, its head was brought close to the post. That done, the rest was easy enough; another rope, the heel-ropes this time, was slipped over the hind feet, and the poor brute was thrown upon its side. There it lay at last,

panting and struggling, with heaving sides, bloodshot eyes nearly forced out of its head, and swollen tongue hanging half out of its mouth ; the triumph of the man over the brute was complete.

Three of the boys sat on its side for greater safety, and the others ran off to the fire, quickly returning with the red-hot branding-irons. The iron "O" was placed on the cow's side first, and a sickening smell of burnt hair arose, and presently a dreadful choked moaning was heard, as the poor beast observed the "V" iron coming. I felt inclined to beg the boys not to do it, but to let the cow go; but perhaps it was as well for our future interests that I had no voice in the matter. Then, the operation being concluded, they proceeded to widen the noose and pass it over the cow's horns as it lay on the ground, whilst another of the boys undid the heel-rope in the same manner, and then one by one they rushed away, leaving the last man sitting on the creature's shoulders.

This was a rather dangerous post, as the cows that have never been branded before are apt to "go for you" when they get on their feet. It was Jack's turn this time, and although rather slow and ponderous as a usual thing, I was amused to see the alacrity with which he rushed to the fence when the other boys shouted "Get a move on you, Jack, old boy!" they themselves being already safely outside. But there seemed to me to be no particular hurry this time, at any rate, as the animal on being left to its own devices lay perfectly still for a few seconds, then got slowly up, bellowed at us all wrathfully, and then trotted quietly through the outer corral and down to the creek for a drink. This finished the morning's performance, at least for E. and myself, as we had to go in and see to the dinner.

We two women felt proud of our table when we had got the meal ready. There was a great round of spiced beef, cold, with plenty of creamy fat—and the western beef is mostly tough and lean—a pair of chickens, a juniper-cured ham, and a beef-steak and kidney pie. For vegetables we had potatoes, a great dish of butter beans, and tomato salad; the sweets I have already mentioned, with the exception of a huge water-melon, pink-fleshed and juicy, with black seeds; and we always thought these had a far nicer flavour than the white-seed variety.

I need hardly say that ample justice was done to the repast by all of us, even E. and myself playing an uncommonly good knife and fork. For drinkables we had plenty of Arbuckle coffee, the kind that leaves a rich yellow stain in one's cup, and acting on the advice of our doctor, who had highly recommended a packet to me, I had brewed some root beer. It looked very nice and frothy in the jug when it was brought to table; but I could not get the boys to try it, except one, who had never seen it before, and so politely took a glass. But as he departed immediately, and went outside to look at the weather, I do not think the root beer can be called a success; Jack remarking drily in his absence : "Guess Dr. Manton is agent for that stuff."

"So he is," I replied; "but how did you find that out?"

He was about to answer when our friend returned, and was finely roasted by the boys, I remarking politely that I hoped the beer had not taken away his appetite; but he only smiled as he answered :

"No, ma'am, I'll allow that it takes more than that trifle to put me off my dinner."

Our dinner-party had its drawbacks, for we were frightfully short of the needful crockery, and had to eat all our food off one plate, making use of our saucers for the sweets. E. had brought her knives and forks along, so we had plenty of those useful articles; but as we only possessed four cups and saucers some of the boys had to drink their coffee out of tin dippers, one of which had a long handle, and was fearfully in the way.

Our salt and pepper castors consisted of two nice clean oyster-shells, whilst a couple of egg-cups held the mustard.

But we had heaps of fun and were very merry over it all, and dinner being over the boys pulled out their pipes and had a smoke, whilst E. and I retired to my room and indulged in the frivolous occupation of hat-trimming. Then after a quarter of an hour's smoke, the men went off to their work, and we women, after washing and clearing up, and setting the table for the next meal, trotted out and took our seats on what the boys were pleased to call the "grand stand" again.

It was a lovely afternoon, not a cloud in the sky, and the sun was blazing overhead, slanting a little towards the Foot Hills, whilst all the grass on the prairie was of a dull uniform grey-green,

except where a bluff or two covered with scrub oak and poison ivy blazed into orange and crimson. There was nothing to be seen of all the cattle that had been branded ; they were hidden away in the shade of the cotton-wood trees by the creek, and had forgotten, let us hope, all their sufferings.

But the few remaining animals of the outfit were still cooped in the inner corral lowing piteously, and refusing to touch the great bunch of cool green alfalfa which had been tossed in for their dinner. I grieve to say they did not receive much sympathy from their friends the horses, for my own pony was close to the corral gate, and gazing at his unhappy companions with a most superior air ; although there had been a time, not very far back either, when Rorie himself had been under the branding-irons.

The first to be driven into the corral was our poor old "Mooly cow," a white-faced Hereford, very gentle, and a capital milk'er.

But alas ! Mooly, unlike the gentleman in the poem, was blessed with a thousand virtues and one crime—that of breaking bounds. She was always kept in the buck pasture so as to be close at hand, and this field had a "snake" fence which she was very clever at getting through, having found out one corner that was very weak. Having done this she would stray off, and had once or twice got herself mixed up with other cattle outfits ; and Mooly was far too valuable to be lost, so the flat had gone forth that she was to be branded again.

Of course she was an old cow, and had been branded before ; in point of fact she had three brands upon her already, as she had belonged to three different owners.

The dear old thing trotted into the corral as quietly as possible ; there was no occasion to rush her and shout "Hoo-oo." She obligingly, just for form's sake, stood still and let them rope her, and then of her own accord she walked up to the branding-post and laid down, without any need of the heel-ropes. As for the boys, they fairly burst out laughing ; there was evidently to be no fuss or bother over astute Mooly, she was only anxious to get it well over, and on hearing them laugh raised her head and looked up reproachfully, as much as to say, "This is not business ; do be quick."

The old cow's "O. V." was quite a work of

art, for she never struggled, and the letters stood out well, and were burnt in clearly.

Then she got up, gazed in mild enquiry at the boys, who had, instinctively, made for the fence, for there was no knowing at branding times what the meekest of cows might do, and giving herself a reassuring shake, trotted off. But not to the creek—Mooly knew a trick worth two of that ; she calmly walked up to the big bunch of alfalfa and made a good meal.

As for the boys, they laughed more than ever, and one of them ran to the well and fetched the old thing a bucket of water—a kind attention much appreciated by Mooly, although she stayed firmly by the alfalfa. Water was every-day fare, but a big bundle of fresh-cut alfalfa was something out of the common.

The next animal turned out was a very different creature ; a two-year-old Texan steer, with a bull throat, and long straight horns sticking out a yard on each side of his head. This, the boys felt, was going to be a nasty customer ; and so it turned out, for, to begin with, these cattle are very strong, and often excessively bad-tempered into the bargain, with small, fierce red eyes, and horns almost straight from the poll, that were capable of giving a very nasty thrust. This gentleman did not like the look of the business in hand at all ; he rushed into the corral with a defiant bellow, and tossed his head first to one side and then to the other, pawing the ground, and glancing angrily about him all the time. All at once, before the boys could get the rope over his head, he rushed at the corral fence, stamped and tore at the ground, and tried to knock the top rail to splinters with his great head. But, luckily, the fence was strong, far stronger than it looked, so the creature changed his tactics and began running round and round the corral, keeping his head close to the ground as he did so, and the boys could not, try as they would, make him look up. They shouted, ran in front of him, beat the stable pail with the prong of a long fork they carried. All was of no avail ; the steer obstinately kept his nose close to the ground.

At last Jack got tired of it, and catching hold of the pony's mane, he jumped upon his back, and man and horse flew round and round the corral in pursuit. A regular race took place, for Rorie got excited and went so fast that the steer had to lift his head and "go his best" also. Then by a well-directed throw, Jack got his lariat

over the head of his enemy, who tossed up his great horns once he felt the noose, and went for all he was worth ; and at last, kicking, struggling, and bellowing, the great brute was brought up to the branding-post and thrown, and I don't know which looked the most exhausted when the contest was over, man or beast.

There the poor thing lay, conquered at last, its eyes bloodshot, its mouth open and frothy, with a swollen tongue hanging half out of it, whilst the noose had had to be so tightened that the rope was hidden by the flesh closing round it ; and through the open jaws, dropping saliva, came a fierce, choked moan, whilst its sides heaved and fell as if the creature was dying.

As for the men, they were not much better ; they stood or sat on the animal gasping for breath, and passed their shirt-sleeves over their foreheads to wipe off the moisture which literally poured off their faces, all blackened and streaked with the smoke from the fire which was blazing up into the clearair. It was certainly no childish play the boys had been through ; their faces were crimson with exertion, whilst the veins on their arms stood out like a network of ropes.

I felt disgusted with the whole scene ; for the moment it seemed as if one stood somehow outside the pale of civilisation, and were about to assist at a Pagan sacrifice.

“Let us go home. I don't like this,” I said to E. “Let us go home and make some tea and be Christians again.”

E. laughed.

“Why, you are surely going to wait and see the end ; you said you wanted to see a Western branding, anyhow.” Adding encouragingly : “ You'll soon get used to all this ; it turned me at first.”

At this moment came a moan of terror from the prostrate creature on the ground, and then arose again the sickening smell of burnt hair, and the operation was over.

Then, with the utmost caution, the heel-ropes were loosened, passed over the legs, and the boys bolted. Not a moment too soon either, for, with an angry bellow, and driven half frantic with pain and terror, the steer was up and after them, whilst they flew for the fence. One, two, three, all were safely over but poor Jack, whose foot had caught in one of the branding-irons which had been hastily flung down ; and at the same moment, with a roar of satisfaction, his enemy discovered the fact and went for him.

Heaven help Jack if those long, pointed horns were thrust into his side ! We women on the haystack gave a scream of terror, the shrillness of which startled the enemy, for he actually paused for a moment, and looked to see where the new danger came from, one of us, in a frantic desire to do something, however silly, flinging her crimson “en tout cas” into the corral, or, rather, lodging it upon one of the posts ; and the Colonel, who always had his wits about him, seized hold of it and presented it to the animal as a peace offering. My poor parasol ! For many weeks afterwards fragments of the silk decorated the corral. The ivory handle was split into a thousand fragments, whilst as for the framework—well, the less said about that the better. But during its destruction Jack picked himself up and got out of the way of danger.

After that E. and I had had enough. I did not feel like “getting used to it” somehow, and even the boys were, I think, glad when that day's work came to an end. We soon had supper spread—half-past six was our time out West—it was simply dinner over again, with the addition of jam, cake, and potted meat ; butter, of course, you have with every meal ; but the boys had still, poor things, the chores to see to.

One of them milked, another brought in the wood for the next day, a third fed the animals, whilst the others got some hot water from the reservoir, as the boiler is called, and, taking pails and lumps of yellow soap, enjoyed the luxury of a wash outside the kitchen door, and then did their hair with the aid of Jack's comb and a hanging glass in the kitchen.

When they were all tidy we sat down to supper—we were rarely too tired to eat, except at the midday meal in the very great heat ; and afterwards—I never did any washing-up after supper, except on Sunday—we all sat out, the boys with their pipes, and E. and I idle in our two rockers.

The day's work was finished, and a beautiful, a holy calm, born of Nicotiana and a good meal, brooded over us all.

At the same time I had come to one conclusion, and wished to make it known to my men-folk.

“Boys,” I said solemnly, “I suppose branding is a necessary evil ?”

My own boys looked as if I had taken leave of my senses, the strangers indulgently, whilst the Colonel was heard

to murmur that "There was money in it."

"That may be," I replied; "but I never mean to be present at a branding again."

And I kept my word, in spite of persuasions and chaff. I could chaff back again, and did. That day's work was my first and last experience of cattle branding.

Presently our visitors departed, and we saw them over the track after the nineteen p.m. express had gone thundering past, and watched them loping across the prairie, their clearly-cut figures standing blackly out against the sky.

We four—for E. was spending the night—walked slowly back to the shanty, and being very tired, went to bed, where, in spite of feeling the laths of the wooden bedstead through the mattress filled with shavings, we slept soundly till the morning sun, streaming in through the uncurtained window, awoke us.

SARAH TINGLE'S YOUNG MAN.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"SARAH TINGLE's been an' gotten 'ersen a yoong mon." So ran the swift rumour from one end of the lane to the other. It began at the low end where the slatterns rise at ten, and crawling off their filthy beds, talk and gossip till the big bells warn them that the works are loose.

Then arise the sounds of hasty, ill-considered frying; and the morning smells change to afternoon.

The lane stretches far—far—for those who understand. One end worships the great plaster goddess, Respectability; and from that you come down by degrees through the houses, fifty odd on either side, towards the other end, whose god is their belly. But their cooking is execrable, and the bloated, fish-eyed man and his fat wife in the public-house at the corner are the high priests of the shrine whereat they worship.

Down there prevails an easy freedom. Every lady and every lady's man can hold a reception at any time. And there is no trouble about it either; they have only just to stand out on the pavement, or to queen it from the easy vantage of their doorstep. This is apt to bring about ill-assorted friendships, some of which lead to the police court.

But the ladies of the upper end do not use the pavement except to shake the early mat, or clean the doorstep; and

then it is hardly etiquette to recognise them. When you call, it appears they each live in an almost Eastern seclusion. To be thoroughly respectable it is necessary to feel that your neighbours are hardly on the same social level as yourself.

Mrs. Tingle was equal to her station. She constantly remarked that, from one week's end to another, she never got out, which in itself was evidence of her high standing as an artisan's wife. Of course that did not include Monday's marketing. She rose early and tied the children's strings with a pull and a push, sending them off to school in good time.

She had them all Church-christened, too, which in itself is another instance of respectability, but they attended the chapel Sabbath school because the prizes were a little better. There were ten of them living, and Sarah was the eldest, her brother George coming next.

"Sarah Tingle's gotten 'ersen a yoong mon" ran up the street on both sides; all the tongues were busy. As the years of her Sunday schooling had multiplied, she was drafted into a "Young Women's Bible Class" held every Sunday afternoon by Miss Habbijam at her own residence.

The girl was a "chapel member," but still no one had ever been seen to walk home with her on Sunday. "Walking" at chapel comes by favour, and there are not many young men. Those there are are usually eminently steady, and come of families with an eye to the main chance. If we acted upon our original motives, it would have been the heavy fathers, not the girls, who were walked with. For they were all warm men. This only holds good in well-to-do chapels—and not always then.

In large families Providence usually places a girl in the forefront to do the brunt of the work—in order that the boys may grow up comfortably, spend their wages as they please, marry a slut at twenty, and begin all over again.

Jane, the fourth child and second girl, was quick and sharp. Early in life she demanded to be a school-teacher. She had passed her standards with flying colours, and was now busily equipping herself with loads of useless knowledge to disgorge into other eager little ostriches. So Jane learnt and taught while Mrs. Tingle and the eldest daughter cleaned, and cooked, and washed, and mended; and her mother's inexhaustible monologue ran like her own shadow by Sarah's silent side.

She was hard-working, steady, and dependable. One unattainable wish she had—domestic service. The neat and decorous black dress relieved by the tidy apron, white cap, and muslin streamers, were her cherished vision. But Jane early and loudly proclaimed her intention of "bein' teacher"; Sarah must bide at home.

Miss Habbijam had a new girl in her class one Sunday—a girl with red cheeks, laughing face, and a new hat. Such a hat, with yellow plush and cock feathers!

Now, in chapel ethics, if you have a white straw hat you may trim it with white satin, and any shade of ostrich feathers you please; but if it is black, the only colour you may introduce is a chilly red or crimson; from this a detonating blue is the only possible alternative.

"Teacher" glanced at the hat. To the prim, flat-chested, and warm-hearted woman, it seemed almost a defiance. So much so, that she determined not to touch upon the subject of dress till she had prayerfully considered the case of Mary Jane Cooper.

"Sarah," said Miss Habbijam, appearing unexpectedly at Mrs. Tingle's door the following Thursday morning, "there will be no class on Sunday. I have been called away to help nurse my brother, who draws near his end," and the red eyelids twitched in sympathy with the sallow face. "Will you let Martha Foulstone, Clara Widdicombe, and Mary Jane Cooper know?"

"That I will, Miss Habbijam. An' when will you be back?"

"I cannot tell," with another twitch.

"An' she might a' been fiadin' some one else to be rannin' of errands," remarked Mrs. Tingle disparagingly; "but there, gentry thinks other folk 'as nowt to do, like theselves."

"I might run round after dinner," said Sarah, unheeding. "There'd be time 'tween then an' tea."

"I'm fair 'shamed on ye, I am!" dropping into her usual tone of querulous complaint. "Ironin' not half done yet, an' Albert's trousis tore from one end to t'other. How's one pair o' 'ands to get through't all, I'd like to know?"

That Mrs. Tingle could and would complain of every proposition her daughter knew well. After washing up she put on her brown stuff dress, plain black jacket, and hat, black, with a modicum of red ribbon. It did not take long to go round by the Widdicombes' to the Foulstones';

but from there it was a little farther to the Coopers' row of new, bright-pink brick houses. There was a little strip of garden in front, filled with auriculas, cabbages, and a lettuce-bed.

"Coom yo in! coom yo in!" cried Mary Jane, her jolly face beaming with pleasure. "Mother, this is one o' t'class mates."

"Ye're kindly welcome," nodding her head from the rocking-chair, where she encircled the fat baby with her stout arm. "Won't ye step forward?"

Sarah hesitated. The whole atmosphere was new to her. The friendly reception amazed and touched her, while Mary Jane's pleasure at seeing her attracted the lonely nature.

"It's nobbut ma son," said the mother with a mirthful glance round; "he wunna eat thee!"

Benjy Cooper sat in the corner between the fire and the window, on the settle. In front of him stood a round white-wood table, with its three painted legs straddling apart. On it lay his "pit-can"—facsimile still of the old pilgrim bottles—also his dinner of hot Yorkshire pudding and rich gravy, almost finished.

"A'hm in ma blacks still," he said jovially; "happen t'young lady's afraid on a pit lad?"

Mary Jane giggled loudly. Little David, standing by his brother's knee waiting for his "piece," glanced wrathfully at the intruder.

Sarah was drawn into the house, and sat down before the big fire, she hardly knew how or why. As she talked shyly of the class and Miss Habbijam she saw the collier watching her intently.

"That's a likely-looking lass," he said, bringing his broad hand down on the table after watching her go past the window.

"She'll never look at thee, Ben," giggled his sister. "They're all stuck-up, that lot at class. She'll never tak' up wi' a miner."

No class on Sunday afternoon left Sarah Tingle rather unsettled. Her father and mother were sleeping heavily, her father in his stocking feet and without his coat, as becomes a careful British voter of his position. From habit Sarah had put on her things and was wondering whether to call for Clara or Martha to go for a walk, when a knock came at the door.

It was Mary Jane Cooper in the hat, and, besides, a brilliant new tie of the latest mauve, a bribe last night from Ben.

The eager charm of her manner carried sober Sarah away with her.

"Father 'e works wi' Parker's like yourn," remarked the girl presently, "so do Jim." This was to show, that though her mother might be of collier origin, on the paternal side she was as well-born as her new friend. "Gran'mother she brought up Ben. When 'e was a little chap she took 'im, so's when 'e got a bit older 'e cu'd go i' t' pit an' work for 'er. She were main set on Benjy, she were, an' 'e never left 'er till she died, an' then 'e come to us. 'E guv' me this, 'at 'e did."

Sarah went back to tea at her new-found friend's persuasion, and when she came home that evening, Rumour flew up the lane with her particoloured wings, "Sarah Tingle's gotten 'ersen a yoong mon."

When her parents heard of it, Mrs. Tingle's wrath was extreme. That her daughter "as 'ad allays kept 'erself to 'erself" should go and take up with a common collier! Why could she not find some decent working man, instead of this black trash?

Then from the particoloured wings fell feathers telling small tales to Benjy's disadvantage. He was wild and reckless, not over steady either. Last races he and eight others took a first-class saloon, and went in style, with champagne. He betted regularly, they said, and even Sarah knew that she had often waited patiently with him to see the winner posted in the "'Tizer" window.

Miss Habbijam, in her new crackly crape, heard of Sarah's engagement, and kept the girl one afternoon, after class, to ask about it, telling her seriously of the grave responsibility of her choice, and drawing an awful picture of the fate of the drunkard's wife. Sarah cried at first, but she flushed up at this description of her lover.

"Benjy's none that," she said indignantly, "an' I'll thank you to let him an' me alone, Miss Habbijam."

But the good soul cared too little for her own feelings, and too much for the girl's future, to be offended. She begged Sarah to consider prayerfully what she was doing, and implored her, at the least, to insist upon Ben's signing the pledge.

Sarah was a total abstainer; her father had always held it a pity to waste good liquor upon females; but she dreaded her sweetheart's ready wrath, and with good cause.

His face clouded darkly while he heard her out.

"I'll none o't!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Thee canst take me, or thee canst leave me, as I am. It's this Psalm-singing old methody as is settin' them agin me!"

But Sarah caught his arm in sudden fear.

"Eh, Benjy, lad, thee knowst thee has a glass too much sometimes. It's thot. An' whatten I do, if thee tookst it often?"

He broke from her.

"Thou canst sit oop an' sing, while ah go to the dogs."

The girl's cry was unheeded, while he plunged round the corner and down the street. Poor Sarah! she waited, hanging about that Sunday night till nearly ten, to meet her mother's reproaches on her return, and to sob half the night.

Benjy, singing and shouting in the public-house till they were all turned out, felt no compunction; he was angry.

But as the days went on, he began to long for Sarah. He was not vicious, only reckless, spoilt, and utterly uncontrolled. It seemed to him a fine thing to be angry, and pay her out for meddling; but as the man he could afford to take her back into his lordly favour again. Her people might look down on him as a collier, but he was earning higher wages than any of them, and could hold up his head with the best.

So it came that after a wild week he found Sunday afternoon hang heavy on his hands, even though he spent it playing cards in the old quarry. But he was too proud to seek her out that evening; he would wait till Monday.

He washed himself then with extra care, threw on his cap with jaunty air, and swaggered off towards her house.

"Sarah," said Albert, appearing on his return from school, "yo're wanted."

"Wanted?"

A dull red burnt in her cheeks, with hope deferred new-sprung.

Albert nodded.

"Outside, an' 'e gien me a penny to say so."

He was standing in the dark entry passage, and she ran into his arms. So peace was made, for war to break again. She was sober, careful, and steady; his wild ways, while she loved him, jarred and shook her moral equilibrium, till she knew not where to turn. He would boast of his powers of work, his successes with the

girls, his readiness to drink or fight with any man ; it was a word and a blow with him, he bragged.

"Sarah Tingle's gotten 'ersen a young mon," but what heart-breakings, what searching sorrows had she taken to herself also !

The last time he stayed away was for three weeks, and only once did she catch sight of him. Reeling home, towards evening, still in his pit-clothes, she saw him return the light laugh of a slattern at the street corner. She turned, hurrying away stricken, with downcast head. He was killing her love fast, she felt, and through the long years of wedlock she looked, seeing herself an ill-used, starving wife while he rioted with his boon companions.

When he waylaid her a few days afterwards, she refused to take him back. "Go thy ways," she cried hotly, "thee and thy drinkin'!"

"Dost mean it, Sarah ?" he asked. The light had died out of his eyes. He had come prepared to make some sacrifices for her ; even prepared to sign the pledge for six months and keep it. He was sick at heart of these unprofitable ways, frightened secretly at the strange hold the public-house seemed lately to have had over him. But of this she knew nothing. The neighbours' sneers, her mother's forebodings, even her own love, embittered the reproaches she cast at him.

"Happen thee'st takken oop wi' another chap ?" he asked in dangerously quiet tones.

She knew herself to be unacceptable to most men, and the thought that he, the favourite with all women, was jeering at her, flared over her soul like molten iron.

"Ay, if I am, it shall noan be a black drunken good-for-nowt !" burst from her furious lips.

"Then go and take him," he answered with a curse, breaking away.

So at last she was free, and the future lay utterly blank and dreary before her. What was her life—what could it be—without him ? His cheery voice and curly hair, the strong, broad shoulders, the easy good-nature and open-handedness, each and all seemed to tear chasms in her heart.

Half that night Ben roamed about in furious jealousy. That Sarah, his lass, who had shown herself dainty and delicate beyond his experience of women, should

have taken another lover, maddened him beyond control. He was like a demon at work next day, cursed and swore at his trammer for not being quick enough, and at the deputy for stopping his holing at a dangerous point. But when he came back his mood had lowered into sullen silence. He came of generations of collier blood on his mother's side, and to her kin he had clung proudly ; his father was an artisan, and from him came his impulse now.

It was past four when he roused himself from brooding in his corner, and, still unwashed, took his way up to the room he and Jim and the two younger boys shared. Parker's works were not loose till half-past five ; but without leave asked he broke open Jim's box, threw out the few things, and possessed himself of the pistol he knew lay at the bottom.

The collier does not play with firearms ; to him who uses dynamite they are mere toys. But the young workman longs for a revolver even more than for a watch, and here was Jim's.

"Sarah," said Albert, appearing on his return from school, "yo're wanted."

"Wanted ?" looking hastily up from the teapot, and splashing herself with the hot water.

"An' ye'll just finish cutting t' bread afore ye go," broke in Mrs. Tingle's monotonous complaint ; "the gell's daft, I reckon, flying out every minute. Reach me t' jug, Sarah, and give Albert his piece ; the poor child's clemmed."

To Ben, every second was an hour's insult. In some undefined way, he had fancied coming here prepared for the last extremity would somehow bring about the reconciliation which, in his foolish, heated brain, he still longed for. But here he was, and waiting, while she would not come. His rival must be there ! Then he would shoot him like a dog. Yes, him first, and her too ! He clenched his strong teeth so fast that it was pain to open them again ; he would give her till he could count twenty.

"One, two, three," the numbers seemed treading on each other. "Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen," he pulled out the pistol to be ready. In the excitement of the moment he was counting aloud, and at "nineteen," Sarah stood in the dark entry. Each could but just see each other by the light at either end.

Whether she screamed first, or he fired, no one knows ; but she screamed again,

one shriek of shrieks! There was a second shot, and as all rushed to the place, a third, as Benji leant up on both arms to put himself this time truly out of his miserable agony.

"Sarah Tingle's sweet'art's shotten 'imself an 'er too!" And this time again, Rumour did not lie.

ANONYMITY.

WHAT is interesting, or powerful, or humorous, or pathetic, will commend itself to those who are capable of judging, whoever may have said or written it. But this fact does not settle the question as to the advantage or disadvantage of anonymity. There are things which are matters of opinion. If we do not know by whom the opinion is expressed how can we gauge its worth? Then some men have special sources of information. We may easily attach too much weight to such circumstances. We should be saved from many snares if we had the courage to decide upon general considerations of probability and the balance of evidence instead of slavishly submitting to the judgement of experts. Even as to matters of fact, anonymity is not so much out of court as might be supposed. What does it matter who compiled the multiplication table? The student in "Punch" asked his teacher as to Euclid's character for veracity; being told that no doubt it stood high, he proposed to take his conclusions for granted, and so save himself the trouble of working out the problems.

The truth of a story is not to be decided upon only according to the character of the narrator. There are some things we should believe, whoever stated them; there are those we should receive only at the mouth of a few trusted souls; there are others we should not believe, whoever affirmed them. If all Her Majesty's Ministers of State and the whole Bench of Bishops, to say nothing of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, and Court of Common Council, were to take their solemn affidavit that the statue of Charles the First, from Charing Cross, was trotting merrily up the Strand, a man in his sound senses would not credit that affidavit and go out to see. It would be in vain to raise the theological question, and bring in Bible miracles; those miracles had preliminaries, and surroundings, and purposes wanting in this case. Relaters of super-

natural experiences are not all wilfully insincere, but they are very untrustworthy. The belief that the grand order of nature has been disturbed on account of their little twopenny-halfpenny affairs indicates a screw loose somewhere; politeness would prevent our contradicting, and we might even seek to conciliate the ghost-seer by a sickly smile, but beyond that we could not go. There are stories that keep clear of the supernatural, yet are so full of inconsistencies and improbabilities that, as Hamlet says of the body of Polonius, they can be nosed.

Newspaper correspondents are in the habit of expressing a great deal of indignation at what they call anonymous slander. Mostly the name of the accuser is not at all required. The charge, perhaps, contains an extract from a popular new book, side by side with a closely corresponding passage from an obscure old book. Are the extracts correctly given? Can the coincidence be legitimately accounted for? These are the questions for the incriminated author. Noakes, or Stoakes, or Stiles may have written the letter—who cares which? Or it may be that a certain politician's speech to-day in the north of England is compared with his speech yesterday in the south, and it is affirmed that they do not agree. Nothing rests upon the personality of the writer; the reports of the speeches are open to all. The complaints of anonymity generally come of annoyance, because the criticised man cannot indulge in personalities; retorts which would not touch the merits of the case. If a man has got a satisfactory explanation he supplies it, and is, it may be, thankful to the correspondent who has given him the opportunity.

The argument for signed leaders in the newspapers is that it would do away with the exaggerated importance now attached to articles which, it is said, express nobody's opinion but the writer's, and sometimes not even his. But if we are men of intelligence we hear what the newspapers have to say and judge for ourselves.

The list of authors in the prospectuses of new magazines has attained a portentous length. Everybody we know is going to contribute, and almost everybody that we do not. There are high-sounding, double names, like those of fashionable physicians, names we have never heard of, but we don't like to say so for fear of revealing our ignorance. Men with such names ought to be great. As to the writers who

are known, the editor says to them, "I only want your name; give me anything you have by you." Out of some dusty receptacle comes the manuscript that suffices to carry the name with it, something that the illustrious author threw off before his greatness dawned, which has been in its time returned with compliments by half-a-dozen editors. The most readable part of the new venture is often that which is anonymous. Here, it is possible, will be found flashes of humour and gems of thought; afterwards, when these chance to come to our mind, we attribute them to one of the popular authors.

Many writers have a style pronounced enough to make a signature superfluous. To have signed an article "Thomas Carlyle" would have been like putting beneath a representation of the animal the inscription "This is a horse," or "This is a dog." In the early days of "Punch," Thackeray and Douglas Jerrold no more wanted a distinguishing mark than Kenny Meadows or John Leech; the source of the article was as unmistakable as that of the cartoon. The style of the leading speakers in a Parliamentary debate asserts itself so strongly that if we begin to read in the middle of a speech we do not want to go back to its beginning to know who unfolds the argument or hurls the defiance.

Anonymity gives a chance to those who have a name to make, if they can. Their contributions are not marked off from the celebrities by the fact that they have an unfamiliar signature. Quality will assert itself in the end, and anonymity makes it more imperative that quality should be maintained. An editor has no occasion to trouble his head much as to his known contributors; if they choose to give out occasionally of their poorest—and most of them do choose—that is their own lookout. The others depend on naked merit.

The ballot has helped to teach us that there is nothing necessarily disgraceful in anonymity. A vote is a vote, whoever gives it; one vote tells upon the result as much as another. And the vote may be as honest as though given in the light of day. But there may be something most shameful in anonymity, as in the case of the ordinary anonymous letter in which often charges are made, difficult to prove or disprove, those which, it may be permanently, poison the mind of the person receiving the communication. A wise man will not burn such a letter, he will put

it away on the chance of convicting the criminal, but he will endeavour with all his might to steel his mind against its influence. Anyway he will be safe in concluding that the writer is a scoundrel to whom lying is second nature. It is anonymity in this form that creates a prejudice against it in other forms.

Criticism, whether it be avowed or anonymous, will have no power to bring into contempt anything that is really great. A man can write himself down, other men can at most delay his fame. We are made ridiculous by ourselves. "The Truthful and the Beautiful," of whom Thackeray speaks in one of his burlesque novels, are faithful to their followers. It is when we depart from them that we expose ourselves to contempt. We have more to gain than to lose from the sharpest criticism. If the veil of anonymity gives the critics confidence in flaying us alive, by all means let them retain it.

WINTER SCENES IN GOTHENBURG.

THE entrance into Gothenburg in winter is apt at times to be startling. The ice of the Gotha river forms rapidly, and unless the cutters from the port are constantly at work, it would soon suspend navigation to and from this very important town. It is a broad mouth, this of the Gotha, so that it is difficult to determine where the river ends and the North Sea begins. The ice stretches for miles. Islets bestud it—rocky little mounds, cold white in their mantles of snow, and for the most part free from houses. The passage of the river is marked by slim fir posts sunk in the water. But the ice often packs, snaps these indicators, and carries them away with the flow of the tide. This constitutes one of the perils of the Gotha mouth in winter. The captains of the merchant vessels here often have their hearts in their mouths.

"That was a narrow thing, between ourselves," said the master of one such vessel to the writer the other day, as we were crashing through the ice on the way towards England. "One of those sticks has gone. It stood on a rock only fifteen feet below water at half tide. We draw twenty feet, and it is half tide now."

As I looked about at the utter desolation of the Swedish coast line within sight, it seemed as if a ship might have a

very bad time here on a winter's night, even though the wind lay low. I agreed with the captain that we were well through our little trial. But he was too busy to trouble himself about such congratulations. We were by no means yet out of the reach of disaster from the same causes.

Once safely in Gothenburg port, one is prone to admire this Swedish town perhaps inordinately. At night it is particularly gay, with its tall electric lamp-posts all along its quays, and its glow of electricity in most shop windows. The Gothenburgers claim that they are one of the best-lit towns in Europe. It is a substantial vaunt; and yet I think they are entitled to the credit of it. One may go into many houses, and many flats of the large houses in the wealthy suburbs, and fail to find gas, lamps, or candles in common use. From my hotel bedroom window I looked across the street into three shops—a saddler's, a gilder's, and a confectioner's. In none of these shops was electricity wanting; and I must say the tarts and bonbons of the last-mentioned merchant had a most seductive appearance under the searching radiance.

After this enterprise of illumination, one admires the exceeding good order, width, and symmetry of the Gothenburg thoroughfares. I know no city to equal it in this respect—at least, no city of its size. Its permeation by fine broad canals is a further beautification of it. To be sure, in winter these are likely to be as rigid as those of the Dutch towns. A number of herring-boats and lesser craft are caught fast in the ice, and vain are the efforts of the big-booted Swedish fishermen to break their way into the harbour. It must be admitted that a street fifty yards wide, with a canal in its midst, having solid and seemly granite quays and bridges, is a rarity in our own land. The Gothenburgers may well be proud of the foresight and quite remarkable taste with which their ancestors, a century or two ago, designed their city.

In its environs, also, Gothenburg charms for many reasons. Instead of fortifications it is semi-girdled by a broad canal, with artificial woodlands and gardens open to the public. The Nya Alleen, or new avenue, is a delightful promenade. In winter it is apt to be a trifle cold, because of its bracing exposure. But even then there is the chance of sport on its ice; and after all, the dry cold of the Swedish winter does not harass like the conven-

tional sequence of frosts and thaws—with fogs thrown in—which makes up an average winter in England. Near this pretty promenade is the market square, which, as may be supposed, is somewhat picturesque an hour or two ere noon. It strikes one as odd to see so much frozen milk. Eggs, too, are far more plentiful than after an experience of Norway in December one would expect. Perhaps, however, they are merchandise laid in the autumn, and kept "fresh" after the newest methods, or they may be imported "winter" eggs from England, in return for the eggs and butter which—the former in summer and the latter all the year round—Sweden sends so abundantly into London and Hull. There is, however, more dead meat in this Gothenburg market than a vegetarian would like to see. I must confess that the sight of the stiff carcases of the frozen pigs and sheep is not a conspicuously fascinating one, even to a man who enjoys a pork chop and a saddle of mutton as much as most things.

A mile or two farther from the outskirts of Gothenburg we come to a beautiful little nook of woods and turf and water, called Slottskogsparken. It is a kind of Kensington Palace Gardens. Having previously taken a drive farther afield, and tasted on the palate the very arid more distant surroundings of Gothenburg—granite rocks piled about with a profusion worthy of Sutherlandshire—one is the more disposed to admire this little sylvan resort. In summer of course it offers all the lures of open-air concerts, coffee arbours, and such things, with which Sweden and Europe in general brighten the season of long days. But it is also agreeable enough in winter, when the trees are frosted, the ponds are swept free from snow, and the youth and beauty of the town come hither with their skates. The Swedes may not be such accomplished skaters as their half-brothers of Norway; but they are fairly deft. Some of the Gothenburg maidens are quite clever and graceful enough to excite warm admiration. By the lake side is a convenient café, where Swedish punch and other fluids may be drunk, and where for a few pence you may sup or dine like a bird from a variety of small individual dishes, containing flesh, cooked and uncooked, and, if you are in luck, also some of the very excellent Cardamom cheese that one does not get elsewhere than in Sweden. When the moon is up Slottskogsparken is exceedingly animated, and the tramway from the town

brings visitors to the ice by the score. But the Swedes are—in winter—a somewhat staid, early-going people, and it is depressing to be rung off the ice by a bell at about seven o'clock. Even patriotic Gothenburgers, acquainted with the world outside Sweden, admit willingly that though their town is beautiful, public-spirited, and rich, it is rather dull. The gaiety of Stockholm, they say, eclipses it. But the second city in Sweden ought not to bow to such an admission, especially while it is about twelve hours' distance from the capital by express train, and an indefinite number of hours by a slow train.

It may be expected of me to deduce all this prosperity in Gothenburg from the local system of dispensing spirituous liquors to the public. I protest, however, that I propose to do nothing of the kind. Gothenburg's situation is alone enough to ensure it a considerable future, whether Sweden and Norway continue to run in harness together, pulling different ways now and then as all the world knows, or whether the Norwegian independents by-and-by cut the silken ties which have bound them to their more aristocratic neighbours. Gothenburg is not the immaculate town temperance orators would like to proclaim it. As seaports go, it can, however, still less be twitted with its immorality and corroding thirst.

As a matter of fact, the Gothenburgers do not all drink water. There are quite enough bottles of alcoholic beverages in the shop windows, and the seafaring men who gather about the quays bear the well-known tokens of mortals to whom strong drinks are familiar as household words. I had the advantage of travelling one day for a short distance in company with two Gothenburg young men of the artisan class and a comely, Madonna-faced damsel, who appeared to be the sister of the one and the sweetheart of the other. They carried a bottle of brandy to solace them on the way, and all three of them enjoyed it. I suppose it was a quart bottle, and it was obviously undiluted with water. Yet in an hour they had consumed it, and the empty bottle had been thrown through the carriage window. I make no inferences from this trivial episode of local life; but it proves, I think, at any rate, that the taste for strong drink in Gothenburg is far from eradicated. Of course, however, no one in his senses imagines that the Gothenburg administrators expected to do more than hamper the appetites of their

fellow-citizens in this particular; and herein they have certainly succeeded. Perhaps it is due in a measure to the local licensing system that the English porter manufactory here does so well. On the other hand, it may be due only to the prevalent love of English things in Sweden. It somewhat surprised me at first to find two English novels running simultaneously in two of the daily papers of the place. No doubt, however, it is an affair of political economy. We take Gothenburg's—that is, Sweden's—butter, and it accepts our fiction in serial form.

The customs of the table here differ from our own, as might be expected. An ordinary Swedish dinner is not a very lavish meal in the size and abundance combined of its dishes. But in its opening stage it is decidedly novel. There is a sideboard covered with little plates, upon which sardines, raw herrings, ham and beef slices, pickles, sausage, cheese, and other things are spread, and among these the diner is supposed to trifle away a few minutes. The average Swede, to whom the "smörgasbord," or bread and butter table, as it is called, is a familiar institution, does entire justice to it. He goes from dish to dish impartially, and eats what appears to be a hearty meal before beginning the solid part of his dinner. Then he concludes with a glass of "finkel," or corn brandy, and with a sigh of expectation seats himself for the soup. Living is cheap in Sweden. A discreet person may always dine and sup from the "smörgasbord" alone, for which he would be charged only three or four pence.

A common sight in Gothenburg in winter, just before the heads of the canals get blocked with ice, is the amassing of herrings in huge numbers, and their preparation for export to London, and also to the interior of Sweden. Of late years the catch of these useful fish off the Swedish coasts has been quite small. Norway does an immensely superior trade in them. But now and then a good time comes, and the bustle in the port on these occasions is highly interesting. The fish are hoisted from the smacks by the basketful and packed in ice with great expedition for the vessel getting up steam to depart in the course of an hour or two. Also, they are shovelled on to open railway-trucks one after the other, and these saunter off to the towns between Gothenburg and Stockholm. Terribly slow are the goods trains which convey the her-

rings and other merchandise. They take passengers as well as herrings at a rate of little more than ten miles an hour.

The movements of the herring in the North Sea would interest the Gothenburg fisherfolk if they could understand by what rule—if any—they were regulated. Nothing seems more speculative than the search for these fish. Sometimes tens of years pass without a good herring year. Then, without any apparent reason, they come in multitudes. From the year 1300 to 1556 they are said to have almost disappeared. During the next two centuries their coming and going was extremely erratic. Then the year 1787 arrived, which enriched the merchants of this town famously. Fifteen hundred million fish are said to have been taken then, and "Gothenburg something resembled Melbourne in the early days of the gold diggings." They were eaten, and salted, and boiled down for their oil, and it was devoutly hoped that 1787 was but the first of a series of good years. But the herrings soon showed that they are not to be relied upon, and the last century has been, comparatively speaking, a barren one.

Of the ice needful for their packing there is, of course, no lack here. Lake Wener itself is only about fifty miles away, and the Gotha, between the lake and the sea, if not wholly frozen across, has hundreds of acres of its course covered with ice a foot or eighteen inches thick. The winters are sometimes pretty hard here, though one does not feel the severity very much. Certainly there is never any such lack of fluid at Gothenburg as in the northern parts of the kingdom, where in January the water is all so fast that a baptism is sometimes accomplished with beer or soup. Nor are the dead here necessarily stacked in outhouses during the winter, there to stay until the thaw of spring comes and allows the grave-digger to attend to his clients. Swedish country life is reputed to have many attractive features. This accumulation of the dead villagers above ground must, however, be one of its unpleasant characteristics.

At the same time a funeral even in Gothenburg in winter seems to be rather a chilly and business-like matter. One day, for example, I met a hand-cart on sledge-runners in the street with six coffins set on it lengthwise and crosswise like so many packages. That the coffins were tenanted was clear by the effort demanded of the two men who had to push the sleigh up a

steep hill, and also by the procession of mourners after it. Upon the whole, the advance of cremation seems particularly desirable for the cold lands of Scandinavia.

The visitor who enters Sweden by Gothenburg can hardly fail to be favourably impressed by his first acquaintance with King Oscar's realm. The Gothenburgers are exceptionally polite to strangers, well-informed, and agreeable. Their city is a worthy vestibule to that gayest of gay places in the winter—Sweden's capital. Between Stockholm and Gothenburg there is a healthy sort of rivalry. Both cities are growing very fast. Stockholm claims, with reason, to be much more beautiful and entertaining than Gothenburg; but the Gothenburgers point to their admirable thoroughfares and street canals, and ask if Stockholm can rival these.

The visitor, however, must on no account journey between these two cities by any train that is not express in the strongest degree, else his idea of Sweden may be much changed. The villages of the land are not lovely unless their situation aids them very much. Even this, in winter, may be put out of court, for the many little lakes which lend a charm to the landscape in summer are from November to March obliterated under snow. The ordinary wooden cottage of the Swedish peasant is as plain as it can be. Even the sight of the green leaves at the window-sill within does not allure the stranger. The housewife may be devoted to plants, but why, as a set-off, does she countenance a dung-heap at her front door? It is nothing in excuse that the dung-heap, like everything else in the open, is frozen hard as a rock. King Frost does not reign despotically for twelve months in the year.

MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Alexia," "Red Towers," "The Little One," etc.

CHAPTER XXXVI. IN "THE TIMES."

So the village was disappointed of its festival, and there was no wedding in Bryans Church the next day. All the preparations were stopped, Mr. Cantillon alone could have told how; for the labour of this, the interviews, the attempts at impossible explanation, the sending of telegrams, the writing of letters, occupied

him till long past midnight on that Wednesday.

Even he did not know till afterwards how it happened that Mrs. Nugent and her party did not arrive by the evening train. This seemed like a providential interference, for he felt sure that his telegram could not have reached her before she started on her journey to Bryans. Later he knew that she had been stopped at Oxford by a letter from Arthur, written in frantic haste and sent by the guard of the up train, telling her in the barest and hardest language that he had at last come to a full understanding with Poppy Latimer; that, knowing all, she had refused to marry him; that before he could possibly hear from his mother, especially as he gave no address, he would have married Maggie Farrant. She might as well reconcile herself to this, for it was too late for any change.

Otto Nugent had some difficulty in preventing his mother from rushing on to Bryans and hearing the whole truth there, for poor Mrs. Nugent could hardly bring herself to believe in this greatest disappointment of her life.

Geoffrey Thorne had gone home, that Wednesday afternoon, in a state of passionate though silent misery. He did not know what to do. Maggie had told him, amid sobs and tears, that she cared for no one but Arthur; and yet she had not said that she would not marry him, and Geoffrey felt that the matter was in her hands; that he could hardly break off with her at the last moment for a reason that he had known all along. But he was terribly troubled, knowing at last that he had made an awful mistake, and that all the loyalty in his nature could not avert its consequences. He could hardly, for more reasons than one, bear the sight of those two when he met them in the lane; Poppy so calmly happy, Arthur so smart and gently self-satisfied; with the remembrance of Maggie's uncontrollable tears, and the prospect of a life's unhappiness before herself and him.

He went again to the village in the evening, and fortunately met Mr. Cantillon in the churchyard, on his way to Sutton Bryans to see him. The Rector, flushed with fatigue and excitement, had a confused story to tell; but it was at least clear that no marriage was to come off between Captain Nugent and Miss Latimer; and Geoffrey was suddenly conscious that a great burden was lifted from

his shoulders; that he could stand upright again.

"And you, Geoffrey?" the Rector said to him breathlessly.

Geoffrey stood still and said nothing. Then, though the moment was grave enough, he could not help smiling into the anxious, tired eyes that were lifted to his.

"Oh, it will be all right," he said. "I'll go on now and ask her; but of course she will say no."

Then he felt and looked a little ashamed.

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Cantillon, "why did you ever do it? I told you not. Didn't I tell you not?"

"Yer, sir, you did. But you know—"

"Of course I know," the Rector cried impatiently. "If I had not been the most foolish person in the world, I should have known then; and I should never have permitted it for a moment—never, Geoffrey! There's a limit, don't you see? There is a kind of sacrifice which does no good to anybody, and hurts one's self to death sometimes. It is a form of suicide. Come, I'll turn back with you."

As they went along the road they exchanged a few hurried words. Geoffrey hardly dared ask for Miss Latimer, and Mr. Cantillon could not tell him much. His kind heart bled for Poppy. Though he had himself felt that the marriage must absolutely be broken off—at least, that she must not be left in ignorance—the thought of her face when she met them on the terrace gave him the keenest pain. She had locked herself into her room, and not even her aunt had seen her, except for one moment, following her hastily into the house.

"Tell them that all is over—to stop everything," Poppy had said in the coldest and most strained tone, hardly turning as she walked upstairs.

As Mr. Cantillon and Geoffrey approached Church Corner, the heavy door flew suddenly open and the cook rushed out into the road. She was going to fetch Miss Thorne, she said, for they did not know what to do. Miss Maggie was gone; they could find her nowhere; she had not been in for hours; and Mr. Farrant kept calling for her, and was so angry and so impatient that they could do nothing with him.

"Go to my house, Geoffrey," said Mr. Cantillon. "Wait there a few minutes. I will either send or come to you."

Geoffrey stood for a minute or two looking up at the windows. Then he walked

slowly round by the green lane, crossed the steps into the garden, and made his way to the spot where he and Maggie had been sitting that afternoon. It was twilight; all was green, and cool, and still. Standing on the path below that grass bank, Geoffrey could see again the girl's figure crouched there, shaken by sobs, unconsolable, turning angrily away from the poor and sad attempts at comfort which were all he had to offer her. Just above was an old apple-tree, and half hidden in the moss at its roots something white glimmered. With one knee on the bank, Geoffrey stretched out his hand to it; it was an envelope directed to Maggie, and on the clean side were written a few words in pencil. Eyes less keen than Geoffrey's could hardly have read them in the failing light.

"Good-bye, grandfather. Arthur is gone to tell Poppy, and it will all be settled soon. You will know I am safe with him. My heart was being broken. You will be angry, but some day you must forgive me, for I could not marry that man.—Your little girl,

"MAGGIE."

Geoffrey flushed and set his teeth as he read the scrawled lines, the evidence of his freedom. The last words seemed punishment enough for having read what did not belong to him.

"Will that scoundrel marry her?" he muttered.

He strode up the garden, along the lawn, up the steps to the parlour window, for he could not go away to Mr. Cantillon's house with that paper in his hand. Looking into the fire-lit room, he saw that Mr. Cantillon was kneeling on the floor, supporting Mr. Farrant's white head. The servants were hurrying in and out. The old man's face looked like death, Geoffrey thought, as he forced the window open and stepped in. The Rector and the maids started and stared, they thought it was Maggie; but though this was only another stroke, not yet death, it was not likely that the grandfather would ever welcome back his little girl through the old window again.

During the next few days, one would have thought that Poppy's old home was uninhabited. No one drove or walked out, no one even went into the garden. No visitors came; the sudden catastrophe at Bryans amazed and frightened the county much more than any illness or

death would have done, and made everybody, even the most eager gossips, quite sure that the only kind thing to do was to keep away. Only the Rector came every evening, bringing all the comfort he could to poor Fanny Latimer, spending hours with her in the silent rooms downstairs. She told him with tears that Poppy was like a stone. She came down to meals, behaved with outward calmness, talked a little about the weather. Afterwards she would stand dreamily about for a few minutes, take up a book and lay it down again, look vaguely out of the windows. Ten minutes would not pass before she would open the door, go out silently and quickly, and in another few seconds her aunt would hear her sitting-room door in the upper gallery open and shut. There she spent her time alone, for Miss Fanny Latimer had not courage or conscience enough to follow her.

"And that girl's picture on the wall! It is there still. She has not moved it. I looked in one day," murmured Fanny.

"Porphyria is great enough to make some allowance for that girl, as you call her," said the Rector, smiling.

"Oh, nonsense, Henry! She cared about that wretched man. She is not a saint—not quite one of the noble army of martyrs, you know. Besides, the ingratitude—but don't let me talk about it, dear."

"I only wish I knew," sighed the Rector.

Some part of his cloud of anxiety seemed to lift a few days later, when one morning he saw in "The Times" the marriage of Arthur Nugent and Margaret Farrant. He suspected, and rightly, that this had taken place at a registrar's office; but so far as it went he found it a certain relief, and promised himself one of these days, as soon as he could leave Bryans and find them, to marry them religiously.

There was no keeping "The Times" from Poppy, for she read it every day. She made no remark to her aunt, but took the paper upstairs to her room and kept it there. She sat on her large sofa by the window, a sweet air blowing in with the scent of May, a world outside bathed in soft, still sunshine. On a little table before her the sheet lay spread out, and from the opposite wall Maggie's face, with all the delicacy that Geoffrey Thorne had given her, looked down at the rich and fortunate woman whose life she had helped to spoil.

As Poppy sat there, somebody knocked gently at the door.

"Come in," she said indifferently; and Mrs. Arch stepped in and closed it behind her.

Looking at her mistress, the good woman's face expressed a tenderness for which no one would have given her credit. To her, at least, Poppy's release from a marriage with Arthur Nugent was a matter of unmixed joy. Her young lady would come to herself some day, she thought, and assured Miss Latimer; then she would be able to rejoice in her escape, though now the shock had almost been too much for her. Arch's own conscience was tolerably clear, she had done her best, she could not have done more against the wish of Poppy's own relations; but now she felt victorious.

"If you please, ma'am," said Mrs. Arch, "would you speak to Miss Thorne? She did not wish to see Miss Frances, so she came straight to me. She told me it was a matter of great importance."

Arch paused, looking at her mistress. For a moment Poppy seemed hardly able to answer. It was the first touch of the outer world, the first voice from the village, the first reminder that anything in life could be of any interest except her own hopeless shipwreck, that had reached her since that day. Nobody had seen her, nobody had told her anything, and certainly she had asked nothing, till in the printed page lying before her she had read the end of the story.

What could Lucy Thorne want? At first Poppy almost said that she could not possibly see any one; but then her conscience rebelled, and the old habit of listening readily to all appeals from the village rose up and asserted itself.

"Yes, Arch. Ask Miss Thorne to come here," said Poppy.

She folded the paper hastily, and threw it into a corner. When Lucy Thorne came into the room, she went forward calmly to meet her, holding out her hand.

Lucy was flushed, and her dark eyes were very bright. She looked almost handsome, and had also an air of desperate decision about her square-set mouth, which suggested riding up to a very awkward fence or an unusually high gate. Her face, full of animation and excitement, as well as doggedness, was an odd contrast to Miss Latimer's. Poppy's pale quietness had something unnatural in it, and did not hide any marks of the storm. With a kind of astonished pity, Lucy thought that

Miss Latimer looked ten years older. The sadness which had once lingered unreasonably about her mouth had settled itself there, and the eyes that used to be so sweet were cold and indifferent now.

"Can she care for that man still?" thought Lucy. But if she believed it she was wrong.

Poppy's pain was that of absolute loneliness, and of realising the almost unthinkable truth that this loneliness had lasted for months and months, all the while she thought herself so happy. It was not so much that Arthur had never loved her, as that the Arthur she loved had never existed at all; that her aunt had consented to deceive her; that her friends had been false to her—Maggie, the girl for whom she had done so much, falsest of all. If the Rector had been true, she hardly realised it and could not speak to him; he belonged too completely to her aunt; he would not understand, and, besides this, Poppy had no wish to complain. She felt rather as if she was dead, or else that life till now had been a dream, all that she trusted failing her. No one had loved her, it seemed; none of those whom she had loved cared whether she was happy or miserable, so long as she carried out their plans for family advantage, for the disposal of her fortune. She was not exactly angry, least of all with Arthur. He, at any rate, had done her the service of breaking the rotten gilded chain that she took for gold.

"Will you sit down, Miss Thorne—is there anything I can do?" asked the Lady of the Manor in her gentle voice.

Lucy hesitated. Now that she found herself in Miss Latimer's presence, speaking became very difficult.

"Well, Miss Latimer," she began, and then, like many plain-spoken, rough-mannered people when they are rather embarrassed, she burst forth and said a great deal more than she had meant to say. "I suppose you know that Maggie Farrant is married?"

Poppy bent her head without looking up.

"As for me, I'm glad of it," said Lucy. "My father is very angry, but of course I think first of Geoffrey, and I always knew that she was utterly unworthy of him. That engagement was a mistake from the beginning, and Geoff knew it himself about as soon as he had done it. But he would have done a good deal more than that for you, Miss Latimer."

This brought a sudden wave of colour

into Poppy's pale cheeks, and a light into her eyes.

"What can you mean?" she said haughtily. "I never asked your brother to—to—"

"No, of course you never asked him. But you liked the idea, didn't you? You thought it a nice arrangement. But if you had known much about Geoffrey—as much as he fancied you did—you would at least have known that such a match could not be a love match. I don't care to have him misunderstood any longer, though to be sure I didn't come here to tell you this, but Geoffrey proposed to Maggie Farrant because it seemed the best way of stopping the talk of the village; and I suppose it did for the time. Now do you understand? It sounds like nonsense to say that a man would give his life to save you from a scratch on your little finger, or even from a breath of annoying gossip—but that's what Geoff meant to do for you. And I can tell you that he would have done it at any time in the last fifteen years, Miss Latimer."

Poppy sat looking on the floor, her head bent down, her colour still burning. At last she said in a low, stifled voice:

"All my friends showed their kindness in the same way. It would have been better for me to know the village gossip after all."

"But he only half believed it," Lucy answered warmly. "And could he tell you? And how could he— Well, we all make mistakes. You say that now, but I doubt if you would have said it then."

"You came here to tell me something else, I think," said Poppy quietly.

"Yes. I came to tell you that Mr. Farrant recovered his consciousness last night. He is very weak, but quite himself. He knows now everything that has happened. He saw the paper this morning—they let him have it before I came down. Well," Lucy went on with a short laugh, "he is going to show Maggie what he thinks of her. He has telegraphed to Oxford for his lawyer. He is going to alter his will, and cut her off with a shilling."

Poppy sat still in the same attitude, saying nothing.

"Serve her right, I said at first, and him too. Life won't be quite so pleasant for

either of them. However, after a few minutes I began to feel sorry for the girl, and to wonder if something couldn't be done, because, after all, he has no other relations, and he will only leave the money to some rubbishing charities that don't want it. And so I thought of you."

"Why did you think of me?"

"Because, don't you see, you are the only person who can persuade him to leave the will as it is. I don't think the poor old man will live long—the next stroke is sure to finish him—and we know that in his heart he loves the girl. He may be sorry by-and-by for having done this, when perhaps it may be too late to alter again. He wants to do it for your sake as much as Geoffrey's—a sort of revenge for both of you. I'm quite sure Geoffrey would be sorry—but he is not here—and besides, poor old Farrant thinks all the world of you."

"What could I do?"

"You could come back with me now, before the lawyer gets here, and tell him that you forgive Maggie, and ask him to forgive her for your sake."

A strange tenderness had found its way into Lucy's voice and eyes. Over Poppy there seemed to fall a cloud of even deeper sadness.

"But if I don't!" she murmured to herself.

Then she looked up, and for a moment or two gazed at the wall above Lucy's head.

"Where is your brother, Miss Thorne?" she said indifferently.

"He went to London yesterday. He is going abroad at once. I don't quite know where."

Poppy got up and walked to the window, and stood there silent for two or three minutes, looking down the avenue. Lucy sat staring anxiously at the graceful, weary figure, the delicate lines of head and neck, the thick hair shining gold in the sun. At last Poppy turned round.

"Let us go," she said.

But the victory was of no use to anybody but herself. For when they reached Church Corner the old man lay dead, his will unaltered, his anger changed into peace.

Poppy went back alone through the wood, where the nightingales were singing, found Aunt Fanny in the garden and kissed her.

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